

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A system for distributing advertisements to a multiplicity of client devices each of which is configured for communications via a communications network, the system comprising:

an advertisement distribution facility that communicates with each of the client devices over the communications network;

wherein each of the client devices downloads advertisements from the advertisement distribution facility, and displays at least selected ones of the downloaded advertisements;

and

wherein the advertisement distribution facility includes an auditing function that transmits a send audit data request to a subset of the client devices at prescribed client audit intervals; and

wherein the send audit data request includes a request that the receiving client device transmit ad-related statistical data to the advertisement distribution facility.

2. The system as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the ad-related statistical data includes display event-related data regarding advertisements that were displayed by that client device during the prescribed audit interval.

3. The system as set forth in Claim 1, wherein each of the client devices includes an audit data response function that, in response to receipt of the send audit data request:

requests the permission of the user of that client device to transmit the ad-related statistical data to the advertisement distribution facility; and

transmits the ad-related statistical data only in response to the user's permission to do so.

4. The system as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the auditing function transmits the send audit data request to the subset of the client devices at the prescribed client audit intervals in accordance with a client auditing policy under which send audit data requests are transmitted to a statistical sampling of a population of client devices, at the prescribed client

audit intervals.

5. The system as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the auditing function transmits the
2 send audit data request to the subset of the client devices at the prescribed client audit
intervals in accordance with a client auditing policy under which send audit data requests are
4 transmitted to random ones of a population of the client devices, at the prescribed client audit
intervals.

6. The system as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the ad-related statistical data for each
2 client device facilitates analysis of the effectiveness of the system regarding presentation of
advertisements to the user of that client device.

7. The system as set forth in Claim 2, wherein the display event-related data for each
2 client device includes display time data for advertisements that were displayed during the
prescribed audit interval by that client device.

8. The system as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the ad-related statistical data for each
2 client device further includes clickthrough data regarding each advertisement that was clicked
on by the user of that client device during the prescribed audit interval.

9. The system as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the ad-related statistical data for each
2 client device is maintained as a log that is rotated at prescribed rollover intervals.

10. The system as set forth in Claim 9, wherein the prescribed rollover intervals
2 correspond to the prescribed audit intervals.

11. The system as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the advertisement distribution facility
2 includes at least one ad server that stores the advertisements to be downloaded by the client
devices.

12. The system as set forth in Claim 11, wherein the at least one ad server comprises

2 a plurality of ad servers.

13. The system as set forth in Claim 12, wherein at least one of the ad servers is
2 managed by a producer of software installed on each of the client devices.

14. The system as set forth in Claim 12, wherein at least one of the ad servers is
2 managed by a vendor of software installed on each of the client devices.

15. The system as set forth in Claim 12, wherein at least one of the ad servers is
2 managed by an entity other than a producer of software installed on each of the client
devices.

16. The system as set forth in Claim 12, wherein at least one of the ad servers is
2 managed by an entity other than a vendor of software installed on each of the client devices.

17. The system as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the advertisement distribution facility
2 includes:

at least one ad server that stores the advertisements to be distributed to the client
4 devices, each advertisement being stored in a storage location designated by a source address;

at least one playlist server that receives a playlist request from each of the client
6 devices, and that transmits a playlist response in response to each received playlist request;
and

8 wherein the playlist response transmitted to each client device includes at least one
playlist that identifies advertisements to be downloaded by that client device.

18. The system as set forth in Claim 1, wherein:
2 the advertisement distribution facility includes:

at least one ad server that stores the advertisements to be distributed to the
4 client devices, each advertisement being stored in a storage location designated by a source
address;

6 at least one playlist server that provides at least one playlist for each client

device; and

- 8 the at least one playlist provided for each client device identifies advertisements to be
downloaded by that client device.

19. The system as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the communications network
2 comprises the Internet.

20. The system as set forth in Claim 1, wherein each of the client devices is equipped
2 with software that effects communications with both the system for distributing
advertisements and with a data communications service provider.

21. The system as set forth in Claim 20, wherein the software is subsidized by
2 revenues attributable to the downloaded advertisements.

22. The system as set forth in Claim 20, wherein the data communications service
2 provider comprises an e-mail service provider.

23. The system as set forth in Claim 22, wherein the data communications service
2 provider comprises an Internet service provider.

24. The system as set forth in Claim 20, wherein the software is e-mail software.

25. The system as set forth in Claim 24, wherein the e-mail software is subsidized by
2 revenues attributable to the downloaded advertisements.

26. The system as set forth in Claim 20, wherein the data communications service
2 provider comprises an e-mail service provider.

27. The system as set forth in Claim 20, wherein the data communications service
2 provider comprises an Internet service provider.

28. The system as set forth in Claim 20, wherein the advertisement distribution
2 system is operated by a producer of the software.

29. The system as set forth in Claim 20, wherein the advertisement distribution
2 system is operated by a vendor of the software.

30. The system as set forth in Claim 28, wherein the software is e-mail software.

31. The system as set forth in Claim 29, wherein the software is e-mail software.

32. A system for distributing advertisements to a multiplicity of client devices each
2 of which is configured for communications via a communications network, the system
comprising:

4 an advertisement distribution facility that communicates with each of the client
devices over the communications network;

6 wherein each of the client devices downloads advertisements from the advertisement
distribution facility, and displays at least selected ones of the downloaded advertisements;
8 and

10 wherein the advertisement distribution facility includes an auditing function that
transmits a send audit data request to a subset of the client devices at prescribed client audit
intervals; and

12 wherein the send audit data request includes a request that the receiving client device
transmit audit data to the advertisement distribution facility; and

14 wherein the audit data for each client device reflects activity by that client device
during a current one of the prescribed client audit intervals.

33. The system as set forth in Claim 32, wherein:

2 each of the client devices is equipped with software that effects communications with
both the system for distributing advertisements and with a data communications service
4 provider; and

the audit data for each client device includes features of the software used by a user(s)

6 of that client device during the current one of the prescribed audit intervals.

34. The system as set forth in Claim 32, wherein the audit data for each client device
2 includes user demographic data relating to a user(s) of that client device.

35. The system as set forth in Claim 32, wherein:
2 each of the client devices is equipped with software that effects communications with
both the system for distributing advertisements and with a data communications service
4 provider; and

the audit data for each client device includes features of the software used by a user(s)
6 of that client device during the current one of the prescribed audit intervals.

36. The system as set forth in Claim 32, wherein the audit data for each client device
2 includes settings selected by a user(s) of that client device during the current one of the
prescribed audit intervals.

37. The system as set forth in Claim 32, wherein each of the client devices is
2 equipped with software that effects communications with both the system for distributing
advertisements and with a data communications service provider, and that generates a
4 distributor identifier that identifies a distributor that distributed the software installed on that
client device.

38. The system as set forth in Claim 37, wherein the audit data for each client device
2 includes the distributor identifier generated by the software installed on that client device.

39. The system as set forth in Claim 32, wherein:
2 each of the client devices is equipped with software that effects communications with
both the system for distributing advertisements and with a data communications service
4 provider; and

the audit data for each client device includes data reflecting usage of the software by a
6 user(s) of that client device during the current one of the prescribed audit intervals.

40. The system as set forth in Claim 32, wherein each of the client devices includes
2 an audit data response function that, in response to receipt of the send audit data request:
requests the permission of the user of that client device to transmit the audit data to
4 the advertisement distribution facility; and
transmits the audit data only in response to the user's permission to do so.

41. The system as set forth in Claim 32, wherein the auditing function transmits the
2 send audit data request to the subset of the client devices at the prescribed client audit
intervals in accordance with a client auditing policy under which send audit data requests are
4 transmitted to a statistical sampling of a population of client devices, at the prescribed client
audit intervals.

42. The system as set forth in Claim 32, wherein the auditing function transmits the
2 send audit data request to the subset of the client devices at the prescribed client audit
intervals in accordance with a client auditing policy under which send audit data requests are
4 transmitted to random ones of a population of the client devices, at the prescribed client audit
intervals.

43. The system as set forth in Claim 32, wherein the communications network
2 comprises the Internet.

44. The system as set forth in Claim 32, wherein each of the client devices is
2 equipped with software that effects communications with both the system for distributing
advertisements and with a data communications service provider.

45. The system as set forth in Claim 44, wherein the software is subsidized by
2 revenues attributable to the downloaded advertisements.

46. The system as set forth in Claim 44, wherein the data communications service
2 provider comprises an e-mail service provider.

47. The system as set forth in Claim 44, wherein the data communications service
2 provider comprises an Internet service provider.

48. The system as set forth in Claim 44, wherein the software is e-mail software.

49. The system as set forth in Claim 48, wherein the e-mail software is subsidized by
2 revenues attributable to the downloaded advertisements.

50. The system as set forth in Claim 45, wherein the data communications service
2 provider comprises an e-mail service provider.

51. The system as set forth in Claim 45, wherein the data communications service
2 provider comprises an Internet service provider.

52. The system as set forth in Claim 45, wherein the advertisement distribution
2 facility is operated by a producer of the software.

53. The system as set forth in Claim 45, wherein the advertisement distribution
2 facility is operated by a vendor of the software.

54. The system as set forth in Claim 53, wherein the software is e-mail software.

55. The system as set forth in Claim 52, wherein the software is e-mail software.

56. The system as set forth in Claim 32, wherein the audit data for each client device
2 is maintained as a log that is rotated at prescribed rollover intervals.

57. The system as set forth in Claim 56, wherein the prescribed rollover intervals
2 correspond to the prescribed audit intervals.

58. The system as set forth in Claim 32, wherein the advertisement distribution

2 facility includes at least one ad server that stores the advertisements to be downloaded by the
client devices.

59. The system as set forth in Claim 58, wherein the at least one ad server comprises
2 a plurality of ad servers.

60. The system as set forth in Claim 59, wherein at least one of the ad servers is
2 managed by a producer of software installed on each of the client devices.

61. The system as set forth in Claim 59, wherein at least one of the ad servers is
2 managed by a vendor of software installed on each of the client devices.

62. The system as set forth in Claim 59, wherein at least one of the ad servers is
2 managed by an entity other than a producer of software installed on each of the client
devices.

63. The system as set forth in Claim 59, wherein at least one of the ad servers is
2 managed by an entity other than a vendor of software installed on each of the client devices.

64. The system as set forth in Claim 32, wherein the advertisement distribution
2 facility includes:

at least one ad server that stores the advertisements to be distributed to the client
4 devices, each advertisement being stored in a storage location designated by a source address;
at least one playlist server that receives a playlist request from each of the client
6 devices, and that transmits a playlist response in response to each received playlist request;
and

8 wherein the playlist response transmitted to each client device includes at least one
playlist that identifies advertisements to be downloaded by that client device.

65. The system as set forth in Claim 32, wherein:
2 the advertisement distribution facility includes:

at least one ad server that stores the advertisements to be distributed to the client devices, each advertisement being stored in a storage location designated by a source address;

at least one playlist server that provides at least one playlist for each client device; and

the at least one playlist provided for each client device identifies advertisements to be downloaded by that client device.

66. A system for distributing advertisements to a multiplicity of client devices each of which is configured for communications via a communications network, the system comprising:

an advertisement distribution facility that communicates with each of the client devices over the communications network;

wherein each of the client devices downloads advertisements from the advertisement distribution facility, and displays at least selected ones of the downloaded advertisements; and

wherein the advertisement distribution facility includes an auditing function that transmits a send audit data request to a subset of the client devices at prescribed client audit intervals; and

wherein the send audit data request includes a request that the receiving client device transmit audit data to the advertisement distribution facility; and

wherein the audit data for each client device includes at least two categories of audit data, the at least two categories including a first category of audit data that reflects activity by that client device during a current one of the prescribed client audit intervals, and a second category of audit data that includes ad-related statistical data including display event-related data regarding advertisements that were displayed by that client device during the current one of the prescribed audit intervals.

67. The system as set forth in Claim 66, wherein each of the client devices includes an audit data response function that, in response to receipt of the send audit data request:

requests the permission of the user of that client device to transmit each category of

- 4 the audit data to the advertisement distribution facility; and
transmits only the category(ies) of the audit data for which the user of that client
6 device has granted permission to transmit.

68. The system as set forth in Claim 67, wherein the auditing function transmits the
2 send audit data request to the subset of the client devices at the prescribed client audit
intervals in accordance with a client auditing policy under which send audit data requests are
4 transmitted to a statistical sampling of a population of client devices, at the prescribed client
audit intervals.

69. The system as set forth in Claim 67, wherein the auditing function transmits the
2 send audit data request to the subset of the client devices at the prescribed client audit
intervals in accordance with a client auditing policy under which send audit data requests are
4 transmitted to random ones of a population of the client devices, at the prescribed client audit
intervals.

70. The system as set forth in Claim 66, wherein:
2 each of the client devices is equipped with software that effects communications with
both the system for distributing advertisements and with a data communications service
4 provider; and
the second category of audit data for each client device includes features of the
6 software used by a user(s) of that client device during the current one of the prescribed audit
intervals.

71. The system as set forth in Claim 66, wherein the second category of audit data for
2 each client device includes user demographic data relating to a user(s) of that client device.

72. The system as set forth in Claim 66, wherein the second category of audit data for
2 each client device includes settings selected by a user(s) of that client device during the
current one of the prescribed audit intervals.

73. The system as set forth in Claim 66, wherein each of the client devices is
2 equipped with software that effects communications with both the system for distributing
advertisements and with a data communications service provider, and that generates a
4 distributor identifier that identifies a distributor that distributed the software installed on that
client device.

74. The system as set forth in Claim 73, wherein the second category of audit data for
2 each client device includes the distributor identifier generated by the software installed on
that client device.

75. The system as set forth in Claim 66, wherein:
2 each of the client devices is equipped with software that effects communications with
both the system for distributing advertisements and with a data communications service
4 provider; and
the second category of audit data for each client device includes data reflecting usage
6 of the software by a user(s) of that client device during the current one of the prescribed audit
intervals.

76. The system as set forth in Claim 66, wherein the communications network
2 comprises the Internet.

77. The system as set forth in Claim 66, wherein each of the client devices is
2 equipped with software that effects communications with both the system for distributing
advertisements and with a data communications service provider.

78. The system as set forth in Claim 77, wherein the software is subsidized by
2 revenues attributable to the downloaded advertisements.

79. The system as set forth in Claim 77, wherein the data communications service
2 provider comprises an e-mail service provider.

80. The system as set forth in Claim 77, wherein the data communications service provider comprises an Internet service provider.

81. The system as set forth in Claim 77, wherein the software is e-mail software.

82. The system as set forth in Claim 81, wherein the e-mail software is subsidized by revenues attributable to the downloaded advertisements.

83. The system as set forth in Claim 78, wherein the advertisement distribution facility is operated by a producer of the software.

84. The system as set forth in Claim 78, wherein the advertisement distribution facility is operated by a vendor of the software.

85. The system as set forth in Claim 83, wherein the software is e-mail software.

86. The system as set forth in Claim 84, wherein the software is e-mail software.

87. The system as set forth in Claim 66, wherein the audit data for each client device is maintained as a log that is rotated at prescribed rollover intervals.

88. The system as set forth in Claim 87, wherein the prescribed rollover intervals correspond to the prescribed audit intervals.

89. A system for distributing advertisements to a multiplicity of client devices each of which is configured for communications via a communications network, the system comprising:

an advertisement distribution facility that communicates with each of the client devices over the communications network;

wherein each of the client devices downloads advertisements from the advertisement distribution facility, and displays at least selected ones of the downloaded advertisements;

8 and

10 wherein the advertisement distribution facility includes an auditing function that
transmits a send audit data request to at least a subset of the client devices at prescribed client
audit intervals; and

12 wherein the send audit data request includes a request that the receiving client device
transmit audit data to the advertisement distribution facility; and

14 wherein the audit data for each client device includes a plurality of categories of audit
data relating to activity by a user(s) of and/or activity of that client device during a current
16 one of the prescribed client audit intervals.

2 90. The system as set forth in Claim 89, wherein each of the client devices includes
an audit data response function that, in response to receipt of the send audit data request:

4 requests the permission of the user of that client device to transmit each category of
the audit data to the advertisement distribution facility; and

6 transmits only the category(ies) of the audit data for which the user of that client
device has granted permission to transmit.

2 91. The system as set forth in Claim 90, wherein the auditing function transmits the
send audit data request to the subset of the client devices at the prescribed client audit
intervals in accordance with a client auditing policy under which send audit data requests are
4 transmitted to a statistical sampling of a population of client devices, at the prescribed client
audit intervals.

2 92. The system as set forth in Claim 90, wherein the auditing function transmits the
send audit data request to the subset of the client devices at the prescribed client audit
intervals in accordance with a client auditing policy under which send audit data requests are
4 transmitted to random ones of a population of the client devices, at the prescribed client audit
intervals.

2 93. The system as set forth in Claim 89, wherein:
each of the client devices is equipped with software that effects communications with

both the system for distributing advertisements and with a data communications service
4 provider; and

the audit data for each client device includes features of the software used by a user(s)
6 of that client device during the current one of the prescribed audit intervals.

94. The system as set forth in Claim 89, wherein the audit data for each client device
2 includes user demographic data relating to a user(s) of that client device.

95. The system as set forth in Claim 89, wherein the audit data for each client device
2 includes settings selected by a user(s) of that client device during the current one of the
prescribed audit intervals.

96. The system as set forth in Claim 89, wherein each of the client devices is
2 equipped with software that effects communications with both the system for distributing
advertisements and with a data communications service provider, and that generates a
4 distributor identifier that identifies a distributor that distributed the software installed on that
client device.

97. The system as set forth in Claim 96, wherein the audit data for each client device
2 includes the distributor identifier generated by the software installed on that client device.

98. The system as set forth in Claim 89, wherein:
2 each of the client devices is equipped with software that effects communications with
both the system for distributing advertisements and with a data communications service
4 provider; and

the audit data for each client device includes data reflecting usage of the software by a
6 user(s) of that client device during the current one of the prescribed audit intervals.

99. The system as set forth in Claim 89, wherein the communications network
2 comprises the Internet.

100. The system as set forth in Claim 89, wherein each of the client devices is
2 equipped with software that effects communications with both the system for distributing
advertisements and with a data communications service provider.

101. The system as set forth in Claim 100, wherein the software is subsidized by
2 revenues attributable to the downloaded advertisements.

102. The system as set forth in Claim 100, wherein the data communications service
2 provider comprises an e-mail service provider.

103. The system as set forth in Claim 100, wherein the data communications service
2 provider comprises an Internet service provider.

104. The system as set forth in Claim 100, wherein the software is e-mail software.

105. The system as set forth in Claim 104, wherein the e-mail software is subsidized
2 by revenues attributable to the downloaded advertisements.

106. The system as set forth in Claim 101, wherein the advertisement distribution
2 facility is operated by a producer of the software.

107. The system as set forth in Claim 101, wherein the advertisement distribution
2 facility is operated by a vendor of the software.

108. The system as set forth in Claim 106, wherein the software is e-mail software.

109. The system as set forth in Claim 107, wherein the software is e-mail software.

110. The system as set forth in Claim 89, wherein the audit data for each client
2 device is maintained as a log that is rotated at prescribed rollover intervals.

111. The system as set forth in Claim 110, wherein the prescribed rollover intervals
2 correspond to the prescribed audit intervals.

112. The system as set forth in Claim 89, wherein the audit data for each client
2 device comprises at least two of the following categories of audit data:

software usage data reflecting features of the software used by the user(s) of that
4 client device during the current one of the prescribed audit intervals;

ad-related statistical data relating to the downloaded advertisements, wherein the ad-
6 related statistical data includes display event-related data regarding advertisements that were
displayed by that client device during the current one of the prescribed audit intervals;

8 user demographic data; and

settings selected by the user during the current one of the prescribed audit intervals.

113. The system as set forth in Claim 90, wherein the audit data for each client
2 device comprises at least two of the following categories of audit data:

software usage data reflecting features of the software used by the user(s) of that
4 client device during the current one of the prescribed audit intervals;

ad-related statistical data relating to the downloaded advertisements, wherein the ad-
6 related statistical data includes display event-related data regarding advertisements that were
displayed by that client device during the current one of the prescribed audit intervals;

8 user demographic data; and

settings selected by the user during the current one of the prescribed audit intervals.